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**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**  
**Historic Landmark Designation Case No. 11-14**

The Civil Service Building  
1724 F Street, NW, (Square 170, Lot 28)

Meeting Date: June 30, 2011  
Applicant: The U.S. General Services Administration  
Owner: The U.S. General Services Administration  
Affected ANCs: ANC  
Staff Reviewer: Tim Dennee

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After careful consideration, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board designate the Civil Service Building, 1724 F Street, NW, to be designated a landmark to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. It is further recommended that the application be forwarded to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Now the offices of the U.S. Trade Representatives and for the Secret Service, the building at 1724 F Street was erected in 1911 by the Samuel J. Prescott Company to a design by prominent Washington architect Appleton P. Clark, Jr. The developer was the property owner, patent attorney Victor J. Evans.

The six-story brick building was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style, with a classical organization and character-defining broad eaves and heavy cornice. Its design reflected the intense interest in classicism of the City Beautiful movement and its urbane adherents, including Clark. Of course, this fashion was already two decades old at the time of the Civil Service Building's construction, and even as the City Beautiful movement began to fade, classicism would remain the principal design influence for government and institutional buildings for three decades more.

A handsome building for its contrast of elaborate cornice with restrained and nearly flat wall surfaces and for its balance of vertical pilasters between pronounced horizontal base and attic story, the Civil Service Building is consistent with the prevailing mode of architecture for federal buildings of the time and was designed by a prolific and talented local architect. It retains high integrity of plan and exterior. But it is less the structure's particular architecture for which the building merits designation, and more the *type* of building and *how* it was designed and built.

Victor Evans undertook construction of the building for the purpose of housing a federal agency. The government offered him a contract to lease the finished structure with an option to purchase it later. Thus relieved of the risk of erecting a speculative office building, he quickly delivered the project. Its modest size and simplicity—and the lack of any permanent signage identifying it

as a federal agency headquarters—probably reflect the fact that it was privately developed, but it was intended for a specific and relatively small agency, the Civil Service Commission.

Previously confined to cramped and worn downtown offices, the Civil Service Commission was one of the younger federal agencies, established in 1883 part of a first wave of regulatory reform agencies (the Interstate Commerce Commission was established in 1887). During the activist administrations of the Progressive Era, many of these small executive-branch agencies grew markedly and needed more space adapted to modern office use.

The Civil Service Commission was created to replace the corrupt, old “spoils system” of federal appointments with a system of merit-based appointments and promotions. Over time, its responsibilities extended to the protection of employees, even in retirement. Initially, the Commission had jurisdiction over a little more than ten percent of federal civilian jobs, but this number increased greatly over the following decades. The workforce itself grew rapidly, including with the addition of a new cabinet-level agency, the Department of Commerce, in 1903. During Roosevelt’s administration alone, the number of “classified” positions subject to the civil service rules increased by nearly 120,000, and the Commission also assisted agencies that had their own examination systems for hiring and promotion. It was only a few years before the construction of the Civil Service Building that the majority of federal positions had come under the Commission’s jurisdiction.

The impulse to grow government often ran up against the reality of limited revenue. Congress could not or would not make sufficient capital appropriations for buildings to accommodate completely the “vast army” of workers.<sup>1</sup> The executive branch thus innovated by agreeing to long-term leases on yet-to-be-built projects. The Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury would supply a private developer with specifications, and the developer would be responsible for design and construction.

This “construct-to-lease” mechanism provided a means to obtain space quickly, without a special appropriation, and provided the government the option to purchase the property or vacate it at the end of the lease. This was not completely novel, as the nearby Winder Building was constructed for the government by a private developer in 1848. But the practice was formalized in the early twentieth century, and a few office buildings were so developed in Washington. This period coincided with the enactment of the Tarsney Act which, in an effort to encourage up-to-date design, permitted the government to award commissions for new federal buildings to private architects, instead of relying on the staff architects of the Treasury Department.

There were other contemporary buildings developed similarly to the Civil Service headquarters, but these were generally vacated and demolished after the Federal Triangle was constructed. A “lease-to-purchase” program was also instituted in the mid twentieth century to address a construction backlog from the Depression years and the Second World War.

The Civil Service Building is significant as the headquarters of the United States Civil Service Commission from 1911 to 1950. The Commission was responsible for the reform and administration of a rapidly expanding federal employment system. Its former headquarters

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<sup>1</sup> As it was, the Civil Service Building was reduced by one or two stories from the original plans.

merits designation under National Register Criterion A as “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.” The Civil Service Commission played a major role in setting the conditions of employment for the federal bureaucracy and thus has been an “institution... that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia or the nation, especially as Washington is the seat of government and a “government town.” The former Commission administration building thus merits designation under District of Columbia designation Criterion B (“History”).

The Civil Service Building also merits designation under National Register Criterion C and District of Columbia Criterion D as embodying a type of an early twentieth-century office building developed privately for long-term use by a small federal agency. It is an excellent example of the mid-sized office building of the time, and a rare survivor representative of this particular period of rapid government expansion.